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MIRACLES.

PASSAGES FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS SELECTED BY MRS. ELIZA R. SUNDERLAND.

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ALL IS MIRACLE.

The devout feel that wherever God's hand is, *there* is miracle: and it is simply an indevoutness which imagines that only where miracle is, can there be the real hand of God. The customs of heaven ought surely to be more sacred in our eyes than its anomalies; the dear old ways, of which the Most High is never tired, than the strange things which he does not love well enough ever to repeat. And he who will but discern beneath the sun, as he rises in the morning, the supporting finger of the Almighty, may recover the sweet and reverent surprise with which Adam gazed on the first dawn of Paradise.

James Martineau.

O Power, more near my life than life itself,

. . . . . .

If sometimes I must hear good men debate
Of other witness of Thyself than Thou,
As if there needed any help of ours
To nurse Thy flickering life, that else must cease,
Blown out as 'twere a candle, by men's breath,
My soul shall not be taken in their snare,
To change her inward surety for their doubt
Muffled from sight in formal robes of proof:
While she can only feel herself through Thee,
I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear,
Seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams
Of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou,
Walking Thy garden still, commun'st with men,
Missed in the commonplace of miracle.

James Russell Lowell.

It is strange and sad that the religious teachings of the past have so largely been such as tend to make us look for God only in events extraordinary and out of the usual course of nature. That is not the direction at all to look for God. The place where God really reveals himself is not in a sun which stands still miraculously a little while on a particular afternoon in Palestine, but in that sun which never stands still, which moves on eternally in tireless strength, carrying day and night, summer and winter, forever round the earth. The place where God really reveals himself is not in a miracle wrought through any man or on any single occasion, to turn a pot of water into wine for the accommodation of a wedding party, or even to multiply loaves of bread so as to feed five thousand hungry men gathered on the shore of a Galilean lake. God's real revelation of himself, were our eyes only not too blind to see it, is in that perpetual turning of water into wine through the processes of nature which gives to the world its lovely autumn vintage, and that ceaseless multiplying of loaves in the cornfields of a thousand valleys, which gives the whole world its food. It is a mistake, it is all wrong, to think that miracles, even granting their reality, can reveal God better than what is not miracle. Dr. Whately once heard a clergyman narrate a wonderful providence by which he with others was saved from a vessel burning at sea. "Being so unworthy", he said, "he wondered that the Almighty should have so favored him." The archbishop listened with grave attention to his story and comments, and said: "Wonderful occurrence! a great and signal mercy, Mr. Thompson; but I have had a more wonderful one. Not three months ago, I sailed in the packet from Holyrood to Kingston, and by God's mercy the vessel never caught fire at all, and every soul on board landed in safety." If we would see the glory of God, we must teach ourselves thus to look, not to abnormal things and interferences with the regular course of nature, but to order, to law, to the cosmos, to the mighty and harmonious on-going of things. Here God stands full-revealed in goodness, in wisdom, in power, in majesty.

Sooner or later it must come that men shall take the sublime morals of the New Testament, its unparalleled conceptions of the nature of God, and its irresistible power over the heart, with the simple narrative of the life and death of Jesus,—these, and these alone, as the essentials of Christianity; leaving all questions of miracles and marvels and supernaturalisms to be settled by every man for himself, as things purely speculative, and not touching at all the real heart of Christianity or religion. Jesus drew attention away from these things as being of comparatively little importance; it is for me to do the same. To love God and man, and to do to others as I would have them do to me, that is true Christianity. To reverence God and work righteousness, that is true religion. And compared with that, all question of belief or non-belief in miracles is of weight as light as the mote that floats in the sunbeam.

J. T. Sunderland.

Father, we come not as of old,
  Distrustful of Thy Law,
Hoping to find Thy seamless robe
  Marred by some sudden flaw,—
Some rent to let Thy glory through
  And make our darkness shine,
If haply thus our souls may know
  What power and grace are Thine.

Thy seamless robe conceals Thee not
  From earnest hearts and true;
The glory of Thy perfectness
  Shines all its texture through;
And on its trailing hem we read,
  As Thou dost linger near,
The message of a love more deep
  Than any depth of fear.

And so no more our hearts shall plead
  For miracle and sign;
Thy order and Thy faithfulness
  Are all in all divine;
These are Thy revelations vast
  From earliest days of yore;
These are our confidence and peace;
  We cannot wish for more.

John W. Chadwick.

Jesus spoke of miracles; for he felt that

man's life was a miracle, and all that a man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shines as the character ascends. But the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain. . .

God is one and omnipresent; here or nowhere is the whole fact. The one miracle which God works evermore is in Nature, and imparting himself to the mind. When we ask simply, "What is true in thought? what is just in action?" it is the yielding of the private heart to the Divine mind, and all personal preferences, and all requiring of wonders, are profane.

The word miracle, as it is used, only indicates the ignorance of the devotee, staring with wonder to see water turned into wine, and heedless of the stupendous fact of his own personality. Here he stands,—a lonely thought, harmoniously organized into correspondence with the universe of mind and matter. What narrative of wonders coming down from a thousand years ought to charm his attention like this? . . .

You are really interested in your thought. You have meditated in silent wonder on your existence in this world. You have perceived in the first fact of your conscious life here a miracle so astounding —a miracle comprehending all the universe of miracles to which your intelligent life gives you access—as to exhaust wonder, and leave you no need of hunting here or there for any particular exhibitions of power. Then up comes a man with a text of 1 John v. 7, or a knotty sentence from St. Paul, which he considers as the axe at the root of your tree. You cannot bring yourself to care for it. You say: "Cut away; my tree is Ygdrasil—the tree of life." He interrupts for the moment your peaceful trust in the Divine Providence. Let him know by your security that your conviction is clear and sufficient, and if he were Paul himself, you also are here, and with your Creator.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

A Scientific Method of Dealing with Miracles.

A scientific theology has to do with facts of the religious consciousness and facts of religious history. The laws it has to investigate are the laws of life as they bear on character and conduct. . . But, at the very outset, we come upon a wide field of disputed facts,—the so-called supernatural. On the received principles of natural science, what are we to do with these? Religious history is too full of them to let us pass them by. Our methods of historical criticism are exposed to their sharpest test in dealing with them. Miracles meet us on the threshold of our inquiry; and one of our first tasks must be to get as clearly before our minds as we can the principles of dealing with them intelligently. Let us begin by noticing one or two contrasts that follow from the difference in the subject-matter between theology and science, as that term is commonly applied.

Science assumes as its postulate or ideal, that every group of facts supposably may be, and in time probably will be, reduced within the domain of natural law,—that is, within that orderly succession of events whose antecedents or successions we can intelligently follow and at length predict. Theology assumes as *its* postulate or ideal, that everything at bottom proceeds from living intelligent, personal force, and sees in any given event an exhibition of that force. Theology deals, in short, with Persons as science with Things. Science has the advantage of showing how a great multitude of facts, once thought to be ultimate (that is to say, super-natural), have been reduced to regular order and succession, grouped and classified, so that the course of them can be predicted or intelligently controlled. Theology has the advantage, as soon as we come to deal with the motives and acts of intelligent beings and with all the higher manifestations of life, that its theories come closer to our notions of originating force. Science does not pretend to know anything about the origin of existing things; and if we attempt to account for that at all, an intelligent Will (as Comte said) is at least as rational and

easy a way as any other. Neither has science ever succeeded in reconciling it to the common consciousness of men, that our voluntary acts come within the uniform and necessary sequence of natural law; such words as virtue and crime, right and wrong—belonging in peculiar to the theological domain—always presume the fact of personal responsibility and moral freedom.

In short, we have the two great realms of Law and Will, of necessity and liberty, of natural event and human character, subsisting side by side, and absolutely irreducible either of them to the other. Speaking strictly, a free act is just as much a miracle as the creation of a world; and, excepting a free act,—that is, an act of intelligent will, such as we are conscious of at any moment,—there is no other miracle.

Now, just how far the province of will, human or divine, extends into the field of action or history, it is not for any man to dogmatize. Most of us would admit that an intelligent act was required, at any rate, to start the human race on its course, and to appoint the Law which has guided its evolution. To some of us—and perhaps more and more, the more we reflect upon it—it will appear not unlikely that a living influence, a pressure (so to speak) like that of the atmosphere, is felt in human affairs, acting everywhere and always, but especially through minds of certain peculiar capacities and gifts; and that this influence (which must be allowed for just as we allow for the pressure of the atmosphere in mechanics) is from a sphere outside the will or the conscious intelligence of man. It is not a thing to dogmatize about; and its laws, supposing it to work by law, do not seem very likely to come within the range of our mental science. Still, in speaking of it, we should bear in mind that we are speaking of nothing contra-natural or abnormal, but of what comes into the same order of fact as the evolution of a planet, or the simplest act of volition.

Here, then, is the point to which we are led. All that we call miraculous and supernatural, the whole province of revelation and inspiration, lies, as all history does, in this field, which belongs alike to science and to theology; to one as the exponent of Law, and to the other as the asserter of Will. The question between them is simply how far the province of will, or personal force, can enter upon and control the domain of law, or natural sequence. If we say, never, and not at all, we assert a mere dogmatic fatalism, which is not only incapable of proof, but is in violent contradiction to our moral consciousness. If we say it may enter, ever so little way, by the original act of the Creator, or by the free lifting of a hand, then we waive all dogmatic *a priori* denial of the possibility of miracle and revelation; and it only remains to us to inquire, as accurately as we can, what is the real fact covered by those words. . . .

Two needless difficulties have been introduced by modern defenders of miracles. The first is the view which sees in them manifestations, or invasions, of a higher realm of Law, overriding and controlling those lower ranges of law with which we are familiar. This needless concession to the terminology of science is dispensed with by taking the simpler definition of a miracle, as an act of Will under conditions exceptional and imperfectly understood, particularly when those conditions have to do with man's nervous or psychical organization. The *conditions*, here as elsewhere, are defined by law; but the *act of will* is in its nature (so far as it reaches) the overruling of law. What is law, after all, except *an observed sequence of phenomena?* If there is any force behind it, that force is quite as likely to be intelligent and free as otherwise.

The other difficulty is the assumption, often silently made, that the exception which makes the miracle is to be allowed in a single class of miracles only,—those of the Bible, which are involved in a particular theological scheme. Thus the hardest and most disputed point in the problem is put in front, to be met first. It is evident, on the contrary, that the true method would be to take the easiest and nearest first,—to decide, if possible, on the alleged miracles of our own time; to examine testimony from other parts of the historic field; and thus to secure in

advance the canons of evidence by which the miracles of Scripture may be brought under scientific tests.

I will not speak here of the great field [for the study of miracles] that is opened by the study of comparative religions, but only of what belongs directly to the history and development of Christianity itself. Its earliest defenders (as Justin) admitted the reality of pagan oracles and miracles, which they ascribed to evil dæmons; its later advocates—conspicuously Augustine and Gregory of Tours,—testify in the most detailed and explicit way to miracles of healing and of raising from the dead, in their own experience, and by powers directly conferred on Christian believers. The testimony of these dignified and important eye-witnesses is very different from the innumerable miraculous legends that swarm in ecclesiastical chronicles and lives of the saints.

Catholic believers, however, have always asserted that their Church retained its wonder-working power. And no evidence in history appears to be plainer, more explicit, or more respectable, than what comes to us daily of works of healing, or the like, quite outside any known scientific method, and which can be ascribed only to the exertion of the will under special conditions; that is, they come under any definition of miracle which can be intelligently framed. All these make part of the field open to scientific exploration.

I do not say, all these must stand or fall together. They are found in great variety, and supported by widely different degrees of proof. I do not even deny that the final result of the most skillful and fair investigation may be to leave the miracles of the Bible in their place of honor, the sole and only facts of that order which history will allow permanently to stand. I only say that the preliminary studies have not yet been undertaken,—at least, not carried by any means far enough, — to justify that as the final verdict. For the present, therefore, what we are entitled to demand is this: that the Biblical record, after due process of literary criticism, shall be judged exactly as we judge other records, ancient or modern, of alleged contemporary fact. I say nothing of what it may be when the true conditions of historical criticism are better understood. But provisionally, and for the present, we seem to be justified in accepting a Scripture miracle as true, if the same or a corresponding degree of evidence would convince us of the same thing happening in Asia to-day or in America a hundred years ago; and we are not justified in accepting it, if the same or a corresponding degree of evidence would not convince us of the same thing happening in Asia to-day or in America a hundred years ago. . . .

Accepting this as a general criterion, there is one large class of Scripture miracles, or what are generally regarded as such—chiefly the healing of nervous and mental disorders,—which we may accept [as facts] with little hesitation, subject of course to the criticism of an improved physiology. There are others — chiefly those concerning certain natural phenomena,—which we should almost certainly reject as facts, without any hesitation at all. Some of these may be poetry, like that of Joshua and the sun; some, allegory or myth, like that of Jonah and the whale, the ascension of Elijah, or the children in the fiery furnace; some—like the feeding of the multitudes, stilling the tempest, walking on the waves, or blasting the fig-tree,—a natural enough misunderstanding of the real fact, whatever that may have been, or perhaps a parable misconceived. Such expositions lie mostly in the region of pure hypothesis.

There are others which have taken a deeper hold on the religious imagination, and which have become, so to speak, articles of religious faith in themselves. As to these the judgment of candid and honest minds is likely to be greatly in suspense, and painfully. That we cannot help. We wish to see, if we are candid and honest, just where our principles of belief are likely to lead us.

Of such events the typical one, and beyond comparison the most momentous, is the resurrection of Jesus. To this our ordinary canons do not quite apply; first, because absolute belief in it, by those who claimed to be eye-witnesses, was the mainspring of a great and definite movement in human history; and second, because belief in it not only qualifies men's view

of the course of events in general, as all miracle does, but is apt to determine their whole view of human life and destiny. Not only as the demonstration of a life to come, but as symbol and proof of the victory of good over evil, the place which it holds in the religious mind is entirely unique. Criticism is therefore bound to approach it more deliberately, more anxiously, more tenderly, than it approaches any other which it is really seeking to understand.

We may admit, at the outset, the overwhelming presumption which the modern mind finds against the literal interpretation of the narrative. It is probably not too much to say that no educated mind—that is, no mind trained in modern methods—now believes that a body of flesh and blood literally came from the grave, and in plain sight of men rose above the clouds;—the view of it which most early believers maintained with great intrepidity. That has passed away, along with the dogma of the resurrection of the body, which it was held to prove.

The alternative which forces itself upon the modern mind is plain: either there was no real death, or there was no real revival of the dead. No weight of evidence will outweigh the vast improbability. But that alternative only brings us to the threshold of the interpretation we seek. It only puts the question in another form: Is it possible for a human soul, after death, to manifest its presence in a way of which the resurrection of Jesus is an example and a type? And to this question there are several affirmative answers, giving as many phases of belief,—none of them disproved, and some of them, it may be, not incapable of future proof. Granting that a realm of conscious life exists [after death], it would be absurd to deny that it could be made known to us; and there would remain no difficulty either in the recorded appearances of Jesus or in countless other manifestations of spirits that have passed into it before us. It becomes simply a question of the larger possibilities and destinies of human nature.

It is perfectly easy to see what the first disciples understood by the resurrection of Jesus, and in what sense they believed in it. Paul, to be sure, the earliest Christian writer, speaks of it very vaguely, except as to the point of its reality, which he insists on in every possible way, as the very foundation of Christian faith. The particular event and way of "the resurrection from the dead" he says nothing about, except to insist that it is *not* a form of flesh and blood, but a "spiritual body", that dwells in the after-life. But the next generation have left us no room whatever to doubt of their meaning. They have explained and argued, in the most explicit terms, that it *was* a body of flesh and blood which rose from the grave. It was proved to be so by the act of eating and drinking; it was shown by wounds and scars to be the same that was actually mangled upon the cross; and it was visibly taken up in plain daylight into the sky. It is saying nothing whatever to criticise or condemn that belief, to say that it has passed wholly out of the educated mind of the present day, along with the kindred and dependent doctrine of the resurrection of our own bodies. . . .

It appears to me that the chief lesson we have to learn as to these matters is modesty and patience. Hasty dogmatism is the demand of the impatient partisan, and the source of never-ending, bitter, fruitless controversy. What I have called a "scientific" method of dealing with the subject will tolerate no such thing. The long experience of physical investigation, leading to the enormous enlargement of our positive knowledge and power, teaches always this one lesson,—intellectual humility. Science forbids partisanship and passion: it does not forbid an intense, deep, personal interest in the wide field it explores. The world of man—of emotion, character and act, opened to us in Christian history and in the study of the human soul—is far nearer to our thought, and far more interesting, than the splendid realm of outward phenomena taught in our cosmology and our physics. Let it be studied with equal patience, reverence, humility, with equal loyalty to the revelation of simple fact, and its fruit will not be less precious or abundant.

Joseph H. Allen.

An Historian's Way of Dealing with Miracles.

[In connection with Mr. Allen's thought, three notable papers on "Miracles" may be mentioned, one by a distinguished scientist, the others by those who look at the subject as historians:

(1) In Prof. Tyndall's "Fragments of Science", the chapter on "Miracles and Special Providences",—a keen criticism of Mozley's defense of Miracles.

(2) Hume's famous last-century "Essay on Miracles".

(3) In Lecky's "History of the Rise of Rationalism in Europe", the first two chapters on "the Declining Sense of the Miraculous": ch. I., on "Magic and Witchcraft"; ch. II., and closer to our points, on "the Miracles of the Church". We quote from this last chapter:]

We have now taken a sufficiently extensive survey of the history of miracles to enable us to arrive at a general conclusion. We have seen that ever since that revival of learning which preceded the Reformation, and dispelled the torpor and ignorance in which Europe had been for centuries immersed, the human mind has been pursuing on this subject a uniform and an unvarying course. . . . All the weight of tradition and of learning, all the energies of conservatism of every kind, have been opposed to the movement, and all have been opposed in vain. Generation after generation the province of the miraculous has contracted, and the circle of skepticism has expanded. Of the two great divisions of these events, one has completely perished. Witchcraft and diabolical possession and diabolical disease have long since passed into the region of fables. To disbelieve them was at first the eccentricity of a few isolated thinkers; it was then the distinction of the educated classes in the most advanced nations; it is now the common sentiment of all classes in all countries in Europe. The countless miracles that were once associated with every holy relic and with every village shrine have rapidly and silently disappeared. Year by year the incredulity became more manifest even where the theological profession was unchanged. Their numbers continually lessened until they at last almost ceased; and any attempt to revive them has been treated with a general and undisguised contempt. The miracles of the Fathers are passed over with an incredulous scorn, or with a significant silence. The rationalistic spirit has even attempted to explain away those which are recorded in Scripture, and it has materially altered their position in the systems of theology.

In all countries, in all churches, in all parties, among men of every variety of character and opinion, we have found the tendency existing. In each nation its development has been a measure of intellectual activity, and has passed in regular course through the different strata of society. During the last century it has advanced with a vastly accelerated rapidity; the old lines of demarcation have been everywhere obscured, and the spirit of Rationalism has become the great center to which the intellect of Europe is manifestly tending. If we trace the progress of the movement from its origin to the present day, we find that it has completely altered the whole aspect and complexion of religion. When it began, Christianity was regarded as a system entirely beyond the range and scope of human reason : it was impious to question; it was impious to examine; it was impious to discriminate. On the other hand, it was visibly instinct with the supernatural. Miracles of every order and degree of magnitude were flashing forth incessantly from all its parts. They excited no skepticism and no surprise. The miraculous element pervaded all literature, explained all difficulties, consecrated all doctrines. In the present day the idea of the miraculous, which a superficial observer might have once deemed the most prominent characteristic of Christianity, has been driven from almost all of its entrenchments, and now quivers faintly and feebly through the mists of eighteen hundred years. . . .

[As to the *illogical* consequences of this movement :]

When men first grasped the truth that the tendency of the human mind was from polytheism to monotheism, there were some who at once rushed on to atheism, considering that to be a continuation of the same movement. The disbelief in ghosts led many to materialism, and the

discovery that man was not the centre of all the contrivances of nature made not a few deny final causes. Just so, Science having shown that the phenomena of nature do not result (as every one once supposed) from direct and isolated acts of intervention, multitudes have passed by the impetus of the movement to the denial of the possibility of miracles. To say that Omnipotence cannot reverse the laws of His appointment is a contradiction in terms. To say that an Infinite mind never modifies those laws for special purposes, and in a manner that exceeds both human capacities and human comprehension, is to make an assertion that is unproved and contrary to analogy. To say that the metaphysical conception of Infinity precludes the notion of miracles is useless, because (as Mansel and others have shown) the creation of the world is equally irreconcilable with that conception, and because the existence of evil throws all such reasoning into hopeless confusion. To say, in fine, that there was no use in miracles accompanying a revelation in an early stage of society, is completely to ignore the passion for the wonderful, and the dim perception of the moral, which are the characteristics of such a society. All these propositions flow naturally, but not legitimately, out of the reaction against the "Government by Miracle", in which Europe once believed.

But the *logical* consequences of the movement are, I think, twofold. 1. The difficulty of proving miracles satisfactorily is incalculably increased, because it is shown that, in a certain phase of civilization, the belief in miracles necessarily arises, and that many thousands, which are now universally rejected, were then universally believed, supported by a vast amount of evidence, and entirely unconnected with imposition. 2. The essentially moral character which theology progressively acquires renders miraculous evidence (except for a particular class of minds) useless.

W. E. H. Lecky.

The Real Basis and Meaning of Miracles.

If it should ever be proved that Jesus did not perform the miracles or miraculous works in the order of physical nature, attributed to him in the Gospels, I do not think we should lose an essential evidence of his celestial mission. Some theologians have regarded these reported miracles as violations of the laws of nature, and have on this ground contended that he possessed divine power. This they have made the fundamental proof of the authority of Jesus—and they must therefore defend miracles at all hazards. But many of the best Christian thinkers in all ages have taken a different view. They have not regarded the miracles as violations of law, but as wonderful works revealing a higher order of law, suggestions of powers inherent in the spiritual nature of man. This in my opinion is the true view. Christianity does not rest necessarily on the physical miracles of Christ, but on his moral miracles, which no one has ever doubted or can doubt.

Christianity proceeded from Jesus, and was transmitted by him, not as a philosophy, but as a power, a life, which renewed the old world and created a new dispensation. This is the great miracle. We do not really believe Christianity on the ground of miracles, but we believe miracles on the ground of Christianity. The orthodox doctrine has been, and still is, that Christianity rests on miracles. Our view is that miracles rest on Christianity. That is to say we believe that Christ did wonderful works in the realm of nature, because these works are narrated simply and naturally in connection with the account of his spiritual character and life. It is because of the supreme elevation of his moral and spiritual nature, that we accept the probability that such a being may have had superior power over the natural order of physical nature. . . .

1. We may believe on the testimony of history, that through Jesus of Nazareth there entered the world a great impulse of creative moral life, which has been and is now renewing society.

2. We may believe, though perhaps

less strongly, that during the stay of Jesus on earth many extraordinary phenomena took place, such as the sudden healing of the sick, the raising of the dead to life, a display of miraculous insight and foresight, or knowledge of the present and the future, and some influence over organic and material life, and over the lifeless forces of nature. The precise limits of this we do not know, and need not pretend to define. We need not think it essential to fix the boundary. It may be interesting as speculation, but it is not important as religion.

3. For, in the third place, we may say that these miracles of Jesus have very little direct bearing on our *religion*. As they illustrate his character, they are valuable; and also as they help us to believe that the laws of nature are not stiff and rigid, like the movements of a machine, but that there is force above force, a vortex of living powers in the universe, rising higher and higher toward the fountain of all force and life in God. All portents and wonders are useful, as they shake us out of the mechanical view of things, and show that even the outward, sensible world is full of spiritual power.

4. We may also believe the miracles of Jesus to be *natural* in this sense,—that under the same conditions they could have been done by others, and that they are probably prophetic of a time in which they *shall* be done by others. Looked at as mere *signs* and *portents*, he himself discouraged any attention being paid to them.

Miracles were at first believed, on low grounds, as violations of law by a God outside of the world. Now they are disbelieved on scientific grounds. They may possibly be believed again on grounds of philosophy and historic evidence, not as portents, not as violations of law, not as the basis of a logical argument, but as the natural effluence and outcome of a soul like that of Jesus, into which a supernatural influx of light and life had descended. They are not more wonderful than nature; they are not so wonderful as the change of heart by which a bad man becomes a good man. But they will find their proper place, as evidence how plastic the lower laws are to the influence of a higher life.

James Freeman Clarke.

It is the praise of our New Testament that its teachings go to the honor and benefit of humanity,—that no better lesson has been taught or incarnated. Let it stand, beautiful and wholesome, with whatever is most like it in the teaching and practice of men; but do not attempt to elevate it out of humanity by saying, "This was not a man", for then you confound it with the fables of every popular religion, and my distrust of the story makes me distrust the doctrine as soon as it differs from my own belief.

Whoever thinks a story gains by the prodigious, by adding something out of nature, robs it more than he adds. It is no longer an example, a model; no longer a heart-stirring hero, but an exhibition, a wonder, an anomaly, removed out of the range of influence with thoughtful men.

. . I am glad to believe society contains a class of humble souls who enjoy the luxury of a religion that does not degrade; who think it the highest worship to expect of Heaven the most and the best; who do not wonder that there was a Christ, but that there were not a thousand; who have conceived an infinite hope for mankind; who believe that the history of Jesus is the history of every man, written large.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The Real Value of the New Testament Miracle Stories.

Is the truth of Christianity identical with the literal truth of its record? It is obvious at the start that a certain amount of historic truth must be assumed as implied in the very existence of any religion which dates from a personal founder; whose thought it professes to embody, and whose name it bears. Christianity purports to be founded on the ministry of a Jewish teacher, entitled by his followers "the Christ". We have the testimony of a nearly contemporary Latin historian to the fact that an individual so named was the leader of a numerous body of religion-

ists, and was put to death by command of Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius. But without this confirmation, the very existence of the Christian Church compels us to accept as historic facts the ministry of Jesus, the strong impression of his word and character, his purity of manners and moral greatness, his life of beneficent action, his martyr death, and his manifestation to his disciples after death, however that manifestation be conceived, whether as subjective experience or as objective reality. But observe, it is Christianity that assures the truth of these facts, and not the facts that prove Christianity. Christianity assures the truth of certain facts; but by no means of all the facts affirmed by the writers of the New Testament. Faith in Christianity as divine dispensation does not imply, and must not be held to the belief, as veritable history, of all that is recorded in the Gospel. Not the historic sense, but the spiritual import; not the facts, but the ideas, of the Gospel, are the genuine topics of faith.

Christianity, like every other religion, has its mythology,—a mythology so intertwined with the veritable facts of its early history, so braided and welded with its first beginnings, that history and myth are not always distinguishable the one from the other. Every historic religion, that has won for itself a conspicuous place in the world's history, has evolved from a core of fact a nimbus of legendary matter, which criticism cannot always separate, and which the popular faith does not seek to separate, from the solid parts of the system. And in one view the legends or myths which gather around the initial stage of any religion are as true as the vouched and substantial facts of its record: they are the product of the same spirit working, in the one case, in the acts and experiences; in the other, in the visions, the ideas, the literary activity, of the faithful. It is one and the same motive that inspires both the writer and the doer.

. . . Before proceeding farther, I desire to explain what I mean by myth in this connection. I call any story a myth, which for good reasons is not to be taken historically, and yet is not a willful fabrication with intent to deceive, but the natural growth of wonder and tradition, or a product of the Spirit uttering itself in a narrative form. The myth may be the result of exaggeration, the expansion of a veritable fact which gathers increments and a *posse comitatus* of additions as it travels from mouth to mouth in the carriage of verbal report; or it may be the reflection of a fact in the mind of a writer, who reproduces it in his writing with the color and proportions it has taken in his conception; or it may be the poetic embodiment of a mental experience; or it may be what Strauss calls "the deposit of an idea", and another critic "an idea shaped into fact". I think we have examples of all these mythical formations in the New Testament: and I hold that the credit of the Gospel in things essential is nowise impaired, nor the claim of Christianity as a divine revelation compromised, by a frank admission of this admixture of fancy with fact in its record.

. . . It is a childish limitation which, in reading stories, can feel no interest in anything but fact; and a childish misconception which supposes that, where the form is narrative, historic fact must needs be the substance. The story of William Tell was once universally received as authentic history; it was written in the hearts of the people of Uri; and so religiously were all its incidents cherished, that, when a book appeared discrediting the sacred tradition, it was publicly burned by the hangman at Altorf. For five centuries the chapel on the shore of the Lake of the Four Cantons has commemorated a hero whose very existence is now questioned, of whom contemporary annals know nothing, of whose tyrant Gessler the well-kept records of the Canton exhibit no trace, whose apple placed as a mark for the father's arrow on the head of his child is proved to have done a foregone service in an older Danish tale. The story resolves itself into an idea. That idea is all that concerns us; and that idea survives, inexpugnable to criticism, a truth forevermore. In the world of ideas there is still a William Tell who defied the tyrant at Altorf, and slew him at Kusnacht, and whose image will live while the mountains stand that gave it birth.

And so all that is memorable out of the

past, all that tradition has preserved, the veritable facts of history as well as the myths of legendary lore, pass finally into ideas. Only as ideas they survive, only as ideas have they any abiding value. The anecdote recorded of Aristides—his writing his own name at the request of an ignorant citizen on the shell that should condemn him — embodies a noble idea which has floated down to us from the head-waters of Grecian history. Do we care to know the evidence on which it rests? If by critical investigation the fact were made doubtful, would that doubt at all impair the truth of the idea? The story of Damon and Pythias, reported by Valerius Maximus, for aught that we know, may be a myth : suppose it could be proved to be so, the truth that is in it would be none the less precious. We do not receive it on the truth of the historian, but on the faith of its own intrinsic beauty. There is scarcely a fact in the annals of mankind so vouched and ascertained as to be beyond the reach of historic doubt, if any delver in ancient documents or curious skeptic shall see fit to call it in question. But however the fact may be questioned, the idea remains. We have lived to see apologies for Judas Iscariot, and the literary rehabilitation of Henry VIII. But Judas is none the less, in popular tradition, the typical traitor, the impersonation of devilish malice; and Henry VIII. is no less the remorseless tyrant whose will was his God. The best that history yields to philosophic thought is not facts but ideas. A fact means nothing until thought has transmuted it into itself : its value is simply the idea it subtends. Homer's heroes are as true in this sense as those of Plutarch, and Shakspeare's Hamlet is incomparably more real than the Prince of Denmark whom Saxo Grammaticus chronicles.

I do not underrate the importance of facts on their own historic plane. The historian, as an annalist, is bound by the rules of his craft with conscientious investigation to ascertain, substantiate, and establish, if he can, the precise facts of the period he explores. I only contend that historic truth is not the only truth; that a fact,—if I may use that term in this connection for want of a better,—that a fact which is not historically true may yet be true on a higher plane than that of history; true to reason, to moral and religious sentiment and human need. The story of Christ's temptation is none the less true, but a great deal more so, when the narrative which embodies the interior psychological fact is conceived as myth, than when it is interpreted as veritable history. The truth that concerns us is that the Son of Man "was tempted in all points as we are", not that he was taken by the Devil and set on a pinnacle of the temple, and thence spirited away "into an exceeding high mountain".

We have now attained a point of view from which to estimate, on the one hand, the real import of what I have ventured to call the myths of the New Testament, and on the other hand to overrule the petulant radicalism which, not distinguishing truth of idea from truth of fact, contemns these legends, and perhaps contemns the Gospel on their account. I have wished to show how unessential it is to the right enjoyment or profitable use of those portions of the record, that we receive them as fact; to show that, if we seize and appropriate the idea, those narratives are quite as edifying from a mythical as from an historical point of view; in other words, that the Holy Spirit may and does instruct by fiction as well as fact. If I am asked to draw the line which separates fact from fiction, or to fix the criterion by which to discriminate between the one and the other, I answer that I do not pretend to decide this point for myself, much less should I presume to attempt to settle it for others.

I am not disposed to dogmatize upon the subject. It is a matter upon which each must judge for himself. I will only say that for myself I do not place the line of demarcation between miracles and the unmiraculous, for the reason that it seems to me, as I said before, unphilosophical to make our every-day experience of the limits of human power and the capabilities of nature an absolute standard by which to measure the possible scope of the one or the other. . . .

How far is our idea of Christ affected by a mode of interpretation which supposes a mingling of mythical with historic

elements in the Gospel record? That idea is based on the representations of the evangelists. Will not our confidence in those representations be impaired by this view of their contents? I see no cause to apprehend a result so distressing to Christian faith. The mythical interpretation of certain portions of the Gospel has no appreciable bearing on the character of Christ. The impartial reader of the record must see that the evangelists did not invent that character; they did not make the Jesus of their story; on the contrary, it was he that made them. It is a true saying that only a Christ could invent a Christ. The Christ of history is a true reflection of the image which Jesus of Nazareth imprinted on the mind of his contemporaries. In that image the spiritual greatness, the moral perfection, are not more conspicuous than the well-defined individuality which permeates the story, and which no genius could invent. If the Christ of the Church, of Christian faith, is, as some will have it, an ideal being, it was Jesus of Nazareth who made the ideal. By the very necessity of its function, history idealizes. The individual is the bodily presence as it dwells in space: the historic figure is the image of himself which the individual stamps on his time, and so far as his record reaches, on all succeeding time,—his import to mankind. That is his idea, his mission to the world, his historic significance. It is this that concerns us in all the great actors of history,—the historic person, not the individual. We misread the Gospel and reverse the true and divine order, if we suppose the ideal Christ to be an essence distilled from the historical. On the contrary, the ideal Christ is the root and ground of the historical; and without the antecedent idea inspiring, commanding, the history would never have been.

Frederic H. Hedge.

A Parable.

Worn and footsore was the prophet,
When he gained the holy hill:
"God has left the earth", he murmured,
"Here his presence lingers still.

"God of all the olden prophets,
Wilt thou speak with men no more?
Have I not as truly served thee
As thy chosen ones of yore?

"Hear me, Guider of my fathers,
Lo! a humble heart is mine:
By thy mercy I beseech thee
Grant thy servant but a sign!"

Bowing then his head, he listened
For an answer to his prayer:
No loud burst of thunder followed,
Not a murmur stirred the air;

But the tuft of moss before him
Opened while he waited yet,
And from out the rock's hard bosom
Sprang a tender violet.

"God! I thank thee", said the prophet;
"Hard of heart and blind was I,
Looking to the holy mountain
For the gift of prophecy.

"Still thou speakest with thy children
Freely as in eld sublime;
Humbleness, and love, and patience,
Still give empire over time.

"Had I trusted in my nature,
And had faith in lowly things,
Thou thyself wouldst then have sought me,
And set free my spirit's wings.

"But I looked for signs and wonders
That o'er men should give me sway;
Thirsting to be more than mortal,
I was even less than clay.

"Ere I entered on my journey,
As I girt my loins to start,
Ran to me my little daughter,
The beloved of my heart;—

"In her hand she held a flower
Like to this as like may be,
Which, beside my very threshold,
She had plucked and brought to me."

James Russell Lowell.

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